

"For Every Shepherd is an Abomination unto the Egyptians":

Re-examining the Hebrew-Hyksos Connection

Putting into historical perspective the major interactions between the Ancient Hebrews and their proverbial foils the Egyptians in *Genesis* and *Exodus* can be tricky. No dates nor names of pharaohs are ever given, and what Ancient Egyptian records we have can be rather obscure and mysterious. Revisiting Flavius Josephus's claim that the Ancient Hebrews share a lineal heritage with the Semitic Hyksos kings who occupied Egypt during the Second Intermediate Period may give us a more nuanced perspective on the ancient world that might not answer all questions and put to rest all doubts, but it helps the biblical stories starring Abraham, Joseph, and Moses fall into a historical context that more or less aligns with Ancient Egyptian records. Even if it cannot be satisfactorily verified that the Hyksos and the Hebrews were one and the same people, as Josephus interprets the Egyptian priest Manetho's version of history, it might make even more sense to consider that they were at the very least kindred allies of a shared Semitic heritage who interacted with and impacted each other's histories at key moments in their respective plights. Close attention to small details in the Bible, supplementary Midrash, and what primary sources we have of Ancient Egyptian accounts from the time helps to draw a picture that only makes historical sense set before, during, and after the Hyksos Invasion of the 17th and 16th Centuries BC. This is more or less exactly where traditional biblical dating would place the stories of Abraham, Joseph, and Moses respectively anyway. To verify, we will piece together the history between these two nations from the very beginning up through the Exodus,

see how the legacies of the Ancient Hebrews and the Hyksos Dynasty intertwine, and determine the nature of their relationship.

To set the perspective, we acknowledge from the outset of *Genesis* that there have always been two classes of men, represented by the twins Cain and Abel: the former a “tiller of soil,” symbolic of kingship, statehood, and the active aspect of man; and the latter a “keeper of sheep,” symbolic of the priesthood and the more passive and contemplative aspect of man (*Gen. 4:2*). If we fast forward to the time directly following the Flood when the respective pro-genitors of each the Semites, Egyptians, Canaanites, and Europeans were all still of one immediate family, we find this dichotomy continuing to play itself out in the power struggles between men. *Genesis 9* describes a scandal whereby the line of Canaan becomes forever cursed for something that his father Ham did while grandfather Noah was drunk and naked. The result is that Canaan is made subject to his uncles Shem and Japheth, the pro-genitors of the Semites and Europeans respectively. This episode serves to illustrate why the Semites should feel a certain moral superiority over the Canaanites, which plays out in the rest of the Torah. Canaan’s father Ham meanwhile is the progenitor of the African race, including the Egyptians. His role in this episode also seems to be reflected in how events pan out amongst the three nations as their interrelated histories develop.

Genesis 10 proceeds with the respective generations of Noah’s sons. For Ham, this includes, among others, Mizraim and Put (10:6), who each pro-generate a segment of the Egyptian nation; as well as Canaan, ancestor of the Canaanites, whose descendents include, among others, the Amorites (10:16). The descendents of Shem, ie, the Semites, include Eber (10:21), from whence we derive “Hebrew.” Eber has two sons, Peleg and Joktan (10:25).

Genesis 10:26-29 proceeds with the lineage of the latter, and 10:30 tells us that they settled in the

region extending from Mesha to the eastern hill country of Sephar. Beyond this, we do not read much more of the descendents of Joktan, who could be called a separate stream of Hebrews in the sense that they descended from Eber. Peleg's lineage is reserved for *Genesis* 11 and must be the more important one for biblical purposes, as it culminates with the birth of Abram in his father Terah's native land of Ur of the Chaldeans (Hamite territory, according to 10:8-10). All we are told of Peleg in *Genesis* 10 is that the earth became divided in his days (10:25).

This section of *Genesis* is commonly referred to as the "Table of Nations," as it refers to how the earth was divided up amongst the descendents of Noah after the Flood. In an elaboration upon it in the *Book of Jubilees*, we learn that the Middle East, covering the Garden of Eden and the land East of that extending along the tongue of the Egyptian Sea, had originally been designated for the descendents of Noah's eldest son Shem (8:12-17).¹ This includes the land that would come to be known as Canaan; hence why the Semites would refer to it as their "Promised Land." The descendents of Noah's second son Ham are granted the hot lands of Africa, whereby Cush is allotted the land covering parts of Mesopotamia and Seba (modern Ethiopia), Misraim receives the land west of that, and Put receives the land further west of that along the sea to Canaan. Misraim and Put each found parts of Egypt; the former colonizing a valley by the Nile. When Canaan notices how choice the land from Lebanon to the river of Egypt is, he elects not to settle in the land of his due inheritance, but instead to take up the land of Lebanon around the border of Jordan and the sea. This territory, which had otherwise been promised to the Semites (*Jubilees* 8:29), would cover what is modern day Phoenicia and Jerusalem. In the Torah we come to know of it as the land of Canaan. In response to Canaan's greed, his father Ham and elder brothers Cush and Misraim scold Canaan for settling in a land

¹ Lumpkin, Joseph B. *The Lost Books of the Bible* (2009), pp. 239-240.

that does not belong to him, predicting that his people will end up being violently uprooted from the land and reinforcing the curse upon his seed (*Jubilees* 10:30-32).²

Returning to the Semite lineage, we learn from *Jubilees* that Peleg's son Reu marries Ora, the daughter of Ur, builder of the Sumerian city Ur of the Chaldees (11:1-3). The same is otherwise known as Ur-Nammu, founder of the third Chaldean dynasty who reigned between 2113-2096 BC and builder of the last great ziggurat,³ associated with the biblical Tower of Babel. The city of Ur was infamously rampant with sin and idolatry and the Chaldeans were famously known as practitioners in astrology and such oracular arts (11:3-7). From Midrash like the Books of *Jubilees* and *Jasher*, we know that Reu's descendent Terah engages quite a bit himself in the production and sale of idols. We learn from *Jubilees* 11:13-14⁴ that Terah marries a woman named Edna, who was the daughter of his father Nahor's sister and a man named Abram, in whose honor Terah names his own son, just as he would name his son Nahor after his late father (*Gen.* 11:24-27).

Genesis 11:29 introduces us to Abram's wife Sarai and Nahor's wife Milcah, and also conspicuously adds what seems to be a third woman named Iscah, who is apparently Milcah's sister by their shared father Haran, Terah's third son. According to the Midrash, this is none other than Sarai under a different name; one which makes her a "seer" (ie, prophet) and of royal blood.⁵ This tells us that she was actually a brother to her husband Abram and that she was of royalty before she was even re-named Sarah ("princess"). The question becomes, where did she inherit this royalty? On the surface there is no indication that Terah or any of his family members were of royal blood, nor is there any semblance of a Hebrew/Israelite monarchy until

² *Ibid.*, pg. 244.

³ Gardner, *Genesis of the Grail Kings* (2000), pg. 177.

⁴ Lumpkin, pp. 244-5.

⁵ Ginzburg, Luis. *Legends of the Jews, Vol. 2, V:232.*

the time of Saul and David (*1 and 2 Samuel*). On the other hand, we know from the Midrash that Abram's ancestry would have inherited some Chaldean royalty through Reu's wife Ora, daughter of Ur-Nammu.

In Ancient Mesopotamia, kingship was synonymous with kinship (ie, blood relations),⁶ typically of matrilinear descent,⁷ and believed to have come down from the gods.⁸ It was customary in Mesopotamia that kings descended from such gods would take on the functional title of "shepherd" or "shepherd king" and yield a shepherd's crook as their royal staff,⁹ some 2,000 years before the same title "good shepherd" became associated with Abraham's descendent Jesus, called the "King of the Jews." Numerous Sumerian "praise poems" have been found in which the king is repeatedly exalted as a "good shepherd" over his people.¹⁰ A good handful of such relate to King Shulgi (ca. 2100) and his successor Ur-Namma, both who reigned not long before, if not contemporary with, the time Abram and his family lived in Ur.¹¹

Among the vast pantheon of Mesopotamian gods, there is a prominent pair of brothers named Enki (or Ea) and Enlil, by whose divine grace the kingship is ordained. The former is variously referred to as the "Serpent King" or the "Great Shepherd." The latter is also known as El Elyon, meaning "the God Most High." Another variation on the same is *El Shaddai*; the name by which Abraham knows God as it is revealed to him in *Genesis* 17:1. His cult extended from Mesopotamia into Canaan. This would explain why, when the former land fell into the worship of Enki's son Marduk (aka *Baal*, that pagan god whose worship the Israelites continually fall back to throughout the Bible) and the worshippers of *El Shaddai* become a persecuted

⁶ Gardner, *Genesis of the Grail Kings* lecture transcript. http://graal.co.uk/genesis_lecture_full.php

⁷ Gardner, *Genesis of the Grail Kings*, pg. 88.

⁸ *Ibid.*, pg. 67.

⁹ *Ibid.*, pg. 82.

¹⁰ http://realhistoryww.com/world_history/ancient/Misc/Sumer/Praise_poems2.htm

¹¹ Gardner, pg. 82.

minority,¹² the faithful Abraham is called upon to leave town and head to the latter country (*Gen.* 12:1), where he is blessed for his military leadership against the invading kings by the priest-king of the same God Most High, Melchizedek (*Gen.* 14:18-20). Abraham's meeting with this shepherd king who rules Salem (that which would become Jerusalem) gives us our first biblical instance of a ceremonial breaking of bread and wine. Abraham's descendants King David (*Psalms* 110:4) and Jesus Christ (*Hebrews* 6:19-20) are also known to be priest-kings, ie, shepherds, of the same Order of Melchizedek. According to *Jasher* 16:11, Melchizedek is none other than Abraham's ancestor Shem, the progenitor of the Semitic race. He acts as a spiritual guide for the patriarch throughout the text.

Just before meeting Melchizedek, the patriarch is referred to as "Abram the Hebrew"; the first time in the Bible where that designation is used (*Gen.* 14:13). This term "Hebrew," which we associate with his ancestor Eber, relates to the Mari word *hibirum*, referring to "the part of the tribal people who live with the flocks," and the derivative *hibrum*, meaning a man who has left his home, as in a nomad.¹³ Mari was an ancient town on the banks of the Euphrates under the control of western Semites between the 21st and 18th Centuries BC, right around the time traditionally attributed to the ancestors, family, and descendants of Abraham. In the early 19th Century BC it was ruled by the Amorites,¹⁴ whom we know to be of Canaanite (*Gen.* 10:16). In *Genesis* 14:13, we find the nomadic Abram dwelling in the plain of Mamre the Amorite, brother of two of his confederates in the war at hand, when he receives the news that his nephew Lot has been captured in Sodom. Abram is here called a Hebrew in the sense that he and his small tribe

¹² Gardner, pp. 63-64; 88-89.

¹³ Fleming, Daniel. "Mari and the Possibilities of Biblical Memory." Beall, Judith. Class Reader, History 370: Judaism in the Ancient World, Fall 2015, pg. 1.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pg. 30.

have left their home of Ur to tend their flocks in Canaan. Before the wars with the kings in Canaan, he had also recently sojourned from his new home to visit yet another land.

This brings us to a mysterious episode which may prove a key turning point to all that follows: the Hebrews' first of three visits to Egypt seeking relief from famine in Canaan. In *Genesis* 12:11-12, we read what will be the first of three episodes in which a Hebrew patriarch asks his attractive wife, for his life's sake, to tell the local king that she is his sister and conceal the fact that she is his wife. If it had happened just once, we might be able to write off the king's temporary possession of the matriarch as an undesired consequence; but by the third time when it happens to Isaac's wife Rebecca (*Gen.* 26), we get a sense that this is part of an elaborate ruse that the Hebrews use in order to make the foreign king vulnerable and win wealth and livestock from him in their time of need. The general understanding is that nothing intimate actually happens between the king and the matriarch, and perhaps this is true for the two episodes involving the king of Gerar. However, we have to ask why exactly the king and his whole kingdom should feel so plagued by this incident and why he should bestow so much wealth upon the patriarch before insisting that the patriarch and his wife depart untouched.

Whatever subsequent translations may say, the original Hebrew Bible clearly has the Pharaoh say in *Genesis* 12:19: "Why did you say, 'She is my sister,' so that *I took her to myself for a wife?*"¹⁵ Further, we find in the Midrashic *Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer* 26 that the Pharaoh actually wrote out a marriage contract not only giving Sarai the handmaiden Hagar, who was

¹⁵ http://www.chabad.org/library/bible_cdo/aid/8176/jewish/Chapter-12.htm

apparently his own daughter, but also giving her the land of Goshen¹⁶—the very place where the brothers of Joseph would settle in *Genesis* 47, because they could find good work there as shepherds; something that the Egyptians apparently abhorred but the reigning pharaoh welcomed heartily.

One thing to keep in mind is that marriage to an already married woman was not unusual in these times, neither for the Egyptian kings nor the Hebrew patriarchs (see Abraham, Jacob, David, Solomon, etc). In fact, polygamy was a very common custom among neighboring nations for the establishment of alliances and dynasties. Nor should it be surprising in either culture that a man should marry his own sister. The very appellation of “sister” or “sister-wife” was a legally-binding status amongst the Sumerians, Hittites, Egyptians, and Hebrews alike, which gives that particular wife special status over any other secondary wives that a husband might have.¹⁷ As previously mentioned, kingship was synonymous with kinship in Sumerian culture, and inter-family marriage was a common practice among pharaohs. They would model themselves after the sibling couple Osiris and Isis and put special emphasis on preserving the royal bloodline, as it was descended from the gods. The Hebrews too put special emphasis on keeping the bloodline pure and closely knit, as evidenced by the kinship between Abraham and Sarah and the subsequent marriages arranged between Isaac and Rebecca (*Gen.* 25:20) and Jacob and Rachel (29:10) and her sister Leah (29:16). All four matriarchs who marry the four hereditary patriarchs are closely related by blood through Laban, a descendent of Abraham’s half-brother and Sarah’s full-brother, Nahor.¹⁸

¹⁶ Chasidah, Yishai. *Encyclopedia of Biblical Personalities*, pg. 523; Margolis, Course Reader, Hebrew Studies 332, Spring 2015, pg. 114.

¹⁷ Tuchman and Rapoport. *The Passion of the Matriarchs*, pg. 22; Margolis, Course Reader, Hebrew Studies 332, pg. 119.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, pg. 45; pg. 137.

The notion that Abraham and Sarah are half-siblings is confirmed in *Genesis* 20:12, when during a similar episode in Gerar, the patriarch tells King Abimelech that she is indeed his sister, being the daughter of his father, but not the daughter of his mother. We know from *Jubilees* 11:13-14 that Abraham's mother is called Edna. The question becomes now, who then is Terah's other wife who bore Sarah? If kingship is matrilinear and synonymous with kinship in the ancient world, and if Sarah (aka Iscah) is a princess, we should expect her mother to also be of royal blood. While the Bible and Midrash are conspicuously silent on this question, we do find two obscure ancient Near Eastern sources which not only answer it, but also shed some interesting light on the mysterious events of *Genesis* 12. According to the Ethiopian chronicle *Nazum al-jawahir* ("The String of Gems") and the Syriac *M'arath Gaze*, Terah's other wife and Sarah's mother is Tâhwait, aka *Nfry-ta-Tjewnen*, former wife of Egyptian Pharaoh Amenemhet I and mother of Pharaoh Senusret I (aka Sesostris) of the 12th Dynasty which ruled from Thebes. If we accept these two ancient sources, this means that Sarah is Senusret I's maternal sister,¹⁹ on top of being Abraham's paternal sister. Given that it was common practice for Egyptian pharaohs to marry their sisters in order to progress the kingship through the female line, this would explain perfectly why the Pharaoh should be so inclined to marry her and have progeny by her.

If we are to understand this unnamed Pharaoh of *Genesis* 12 to be Senusret I, we should be able to line up the period of his reign according to Egyptian history with the time attributed to Abraham's lifetime. Biblical dating of this period can be even trickier than Ancient Egyptian dating, due to the relative lack of archaeological evidence. Where biblical events fall can depend on how one determines them according to what methods and angles. As far as accepted Ancient

¹⁹ Gardner, pg. 165.

Egyptian history goes, the reign of Senusret I is generally given as about 1971 – 1926 BC.²⁰ The lifetime of Abraham *could* fall in line with that, considering that various biblical chronologies place it anywhere between the 21st²¹ and the 18th Century BC.²²

Whatever the case, this scenario certainly provides a motive or two for Abraham and Sarah’s excursion into Egypt before attempting to take Canaan, and helps to explain everything else which happens in the chapter. It also assumes that Sarah would have had a child by this Pharaoh, and that was the unspoken goal of the whole endeavor. Given this, it could stand to reason that it would be through said seed that the Hebrew bloodline obtains a certain royal claim in the land of Egypt, as God grants His people in *Genesis* 15:18, where we read that “the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying, Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the brook Misraim [river of Egypt] unto the great river, the river Euphrates.” According to *Jasher* 15:12, the “brook Mitzraim” is the very place in Egypt where Abram and his wife visit in *Genesis* 12. This passage should otherwise strike one as odd. How else would the seed of Abraham secure dominion over the land from the River Misraim to the Euphrates (ie, Egyptian territory), authority over other peoples such as the Kenites, Amorites, and Canaanites; all which had otherwise been designated for the descendents of Ham, according to the Table of Nations? Further, when do we ever read of any descendents of Abraham ruling in Egypt? We know that in *Genesis* 47 his descendent Joseph would come to hold great authority in Egypt and that his brothers would enjoy a good livelihood as shepherds where they are given to settle in the land of Goshen. Does this constitute the royal possession of Egyptian territory such as Abraham’s seed is promised in *Genesis* 15:18?

²⁰ *Ibid.*, pg. 250.

²¹ <http://biblehub.com/timeline/>

²² *Codex Judaica: A Chronological Index of Jewish History*, pg. xiii; Margolis, Class Reader, Hebrew Studies 331, pg. 21.

The fact that said seed is referred to as Abraham's is rectified by another Ancient Near Eastern kin-based custom, which makes any children born to a woman more closely related by law to one's brother-husband on the paternal side than any other brother-husband she might take on the maternal side.²³ It would also be to her paternal brother Abraham that the king's dowry would be given, being that their father Terah was deceased; hence why Abraham accumulates such wealth from the Pharaoh in *Genesis* 12:16. This may account for why the Pharaoh should be in such a panic over his kingdom and why he wants the couple to depart untouched right away; for he knows that an heir of his royal blood that would legally belong to Abraham could end up threatening the authority of his dynasty down the line. Whatever the case, it appears that in *Genesis* 12 the Hebrews have staked a claim on Egypt that they will cash in on in *Genesis* 47. Abraham may have also known that an Egyptian king would be a descendent of Ham through his son Misraim, and securing a touch of his bloodline would give the descendents of Shem an upper hand in confiscating the land promised to them in the Table of Nations from the descendents of Ham's son Canaan, who had actually stolen it from them.

The question becomes, who is this Hebrew progeny bearing some hereditary authority over part of Egypt? It could not be Ishmael, who is born to the Egyptian handmaid Hagar in *Genesis* 16 immediately on the heels of 15:18-21; though he still could be considered both a son of Sarah and a grandchild of the Pharaoh, according to ancient customs regarding children born to concubines (16:2). Ishmael goes on to marry an Egyptian princess named Mahalath, daughter of Senuwosret I by his other wife Nefru,²⁴ whose daughter goes on to marry Jacob's brother Esau (28:9), producing the twelve kings of Edom (18:20; 36:31); all in keeping with the custom of

²³Beall, History 370 class discussion.

²⁴Gardner, pg. 254.

kin-based marriages. Ishmael becomes the traditional progenitor of the Muslims, who have come to rule Egypt since the end of the age of pharaohs.²⁵

The likely candidate for the love child of Sarai and the Pharaoh would be Isaac, the patriarchal heir to the Covenant according to Jewish tradition; Abraham's "only son" whom he nearly sacrifices on Mt. Moriah at the command of God, via a re-birth ceremony involving a sacrificial ram in *Genesis* 22. Unlike Ishmael, Isaac is Sarah's biological son, born in *Genesis* 21 following the similar episode with King Abimelech (20), according to the prophecy of three angels who "visited" her tent earlier in *Genesis* 16 (but after *Gen.* 12) when she "laughed" at the prospect. These three angels include Michael,²⁶ the patron of Jerusalem, and seem to parallel the three Chaldean priest-kings from the East who foretell the birth of Jesus to Mary according to the position of the stars (*Matthew* 2:1-12). It is in *Genesis* 17 that the prophecy of Isaac's birth is really articulated, and it comes along with the name changes whereby Abram becomes Abraham and is told that he will father many kings and nations (17:5-6) and Sarai becomes Sarah (literally "princess") and is similarly told that she will mother many kings and nations (17:15-16). It is also in *Genesis* 17 that the rite of circumcision is introduced as a sign of the Covenant. While this is now understood to be characteristically Jewish custom, the Greek historian Herodotus who visited Egypt around 450 BC tells us that it was originally only performed there, and that the Hebrews only inherited it; a notion confirmed by the examination of mummies and a bas-relief at Karnak detailing the procedure.²⁷ What is interesting is that even when famine hits Canaan again, Isaac is directly told by God not to go into Egypt—as if he might be too vulnerable or something there—and to go to Gerar instead (26:1-3).

²⁵ Lings, Martin. *Muhammed: His Life Based on the Earliest Sources*, pp. 1-3.

²⁶ *Bava Metzia* 86b; Chasidah, pg. 524; Margolis, Course Reader, Hebrew Studies 332, pg. 115.

²⁷ Gardner, pg. 164.

Perhaps the progeny of Sarah's visit with the Pharaoh and the kings said to come from her loins refer to other descendants altogether, who perhaps remain in Egypt and are there to later welcome Joseph and his brothers as kindred shepherds. Surely if Sarah gains possession of Goshen through her episode with the Pharaoh in *Genesis* 12, she would not simply leave it behind without any family inhabiting and ruling it. Indeed that seems to have been the whole point of the episode, and as we will find, it connects up to and makes sense out of *Genesis* 46:32-34.

We know that important Canaanite populations first appeared in Egypt towards the end of the 12th Dynasty roughly around 1800 BC,²⁸ which would fall at least a century short of Senusret I's rule, but agree with some biblical datings of Abraham's time. By 1720 BC, said Canaanite populations had formed an independent realm in the eastern Nile Delta.²⁹ Goshen falls within the same region of Avaris that would become the dynastic capital city of the Asiatic Hyksos "shepherd kings" of Syro-Phoenician origin who occupied and ruled Lower Egypt during its Second Intermediate Period.³⁰ In the time intervening the first settlement of Canaanites in the Nile Delta and the rise of the Hyksos kings from among them, their rulers had coexisted with the Egyptian 13th and 14th Dynasties.³¹ The Brooklyn Museum houses what has been dubbed the Brooklyn Papyrus, a 13th Dynasty/ Middle Kingdom document dating from mid-18th Century BC Thebes which lists biblical Hebrew names of domestic slaves employed in household service. The document refers to these as "Asiatics,"³² but also includes the term *hapiru*, believed to refer to Hebrews.³³

²⁸ Ryholt, K.S.B. *The Political Situation in Egypt during the Second Intermediate Period, c. 1800-1550 BC* (1997).

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Jewish Study Bible*, footnotes, pg. 92.

³¹ Ryholt.

³² Beall, *History 370 Course Reader*, pg. 2.

³³ *Ibid.*, pg. 42; Lichtman.

Like the Hebrews, the similarly Semitic Hyksos could be defined as a nomadic foreign people who had left their homeland to tend their flocks as shepherds.³⁴ When they came to rule Egypt during the Second Intermediate Period, they did so as foreign invaders from the East who set up a vassal state in Thebes.³⁵ Manetho's definition of the Hyksos as "shepherd kings" is often construed by modern scholars as an etymological misnomer, but this would be ignorant of the fact that these Syro-Phoenician kings were indeed "shepherds" after the aforementioned Mesopotamian style of kingship, whereby a king was praised as a "good shepherd" over his people; a concept that had likely made its way into the Hyksos homeland via the regular caravan trade they enjoyed with the Mari along the banks of the Euphrates. This land was controlled by western Semites around the time of Abraham and the advent of the Hebrews; a term identified with the Mari word *hibirum*, referring to a nomadic tribe of shepherd people. Among said Semites who ruled Mari were the Amorites, Canaanite descendents and hosts to Abram during the battle of *Genesis* 14. According to the *Dictionary of the Ancient Near East* (2010), the Hyksos who ruled Egypt for some time were of this very Amorite origin.³⁶ In other words, they were essentially Semitic in nature, while hereditarily Canaanite, and may have even anciently been referred to as "Hebrews" by the same Mari who knew Abram as such. Accepted history gives us roughly two or three centuries between the reign of Senusret I and the advent of the Hyksos rule in Egypt. For this theory to hold up, that time span would have to align with the life spans of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph; which is doable considering the long life spans of the patriarchs.

³⁴ Josephus, Flavius. *Against Apion*, 1:14:82-84.

³⁵ Gardner, pp.169-70.

³⁶ Bienkowski, Piotr and Alan Millard, editors., *Dictionary of the Ancient Near East*. U. of Pennsylvania Press (2010). pg. 16.

The Hebrews' third and final excursion into Egypt during a time of famine would fall to the children of Jacob (*Gen.* 37-50). Joseph is favored amongst his brothers, though younger, by virtue of being the first son of Rachel, the preferred wife. Interestingly enough, it would be Ishmaelites and Midianites (descendants of Abraham's third wife, Keturah; *1 Chron.* 1:32) who procure Joseph's entry into Egypt (37:28-36). After serving time as a slave and a prisoner in Egypt through an episode that vaguely recalls the 19th Dynasty Egyptian "Tale of Two Brothers,"³⁷ Joseph wins favor with the Pharaoh by interpreting his dreams concerning seven years of plenty and seven more of a famine (*Gen.* 41), which also recalls a very early Egyptian myth about "The Seven Year Famine," dating from the reign of the 3rd Dynasty king Zoser, build of the very first pyramid.³⁸ The question might be raised how Joseph, a Hebrew slave, should know so much more about the regular cycles of the Nile than the king of Egypt. Has he not already been immersed in such common Egyptian traditions, or is he perhaps an invading foreign ruler, like a Hyksos king of the 15th or 16th Dynasty?

Whatever the case, the Pharaoh gratefully honors Joseph—a Hebrew slave imprisoned for allegedly raping the wife of his master Potipher, the Pharaoh's officer—by making him ruler over all of Egypt; virtually a king in every respect except in title (*Gen.* 41:40-44). He is also given the Egyptian name Zaphnath-paaneah and an Egyptian wife, Asenath, daughter of Potipherah, priest of On. From what we know of both Hebrew and Egyptian kin-based customs, this marriage between a prominent Hebrew and an unrelated, prominent Egyptian should strike us as conspicuous. Why does the great Hebrew patriarch marry a royal Egyptian princess, and why should the two boys born by her be blessed by their grandfather Jacob-Israel to be counted

³⁷ Precourt. *Classics* 390.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

among the twelve patriarchs of his tribal lineage? This seeming discrepancy is answered by the Midrash in a very fascinating way. According to the *Torat HaChidah*, this royal Egyptian mother of Joseph's two sons who become Israelite patriarchs is actually a child of Israel herself.³⁹ This might make more sense of things, but how is it possible? The answer seems to be spelled out between the lines of the Scriptures.

We understand from *Genesis* 46:26-27 that the souls of the house of Jacob who enter Egypt number 70, but the conspicuous math of the passage only adds up to 69. Further, there is a thirteenth member of Jacob's family conspicuously missing from this whole story: his only daughter, Dinah. Whatever happened to her? The *Pirkei d'Rabi Eliezer* tells us that after she was raped by the Shechemite prince in *Genesis* 34, she gave birth to an illegitimate daughter who was banished from the compound, according to family custom. The angel Michael found her beneath a thorn-bush and transported her into Egypt via a passing caravan, where she was adopted by Potiphar and raised by his barren wife. Her story resembles Joseph's in many respects, and it is she—his own half-niece—who apparently becomes his Egyptian wife, Asenath, a priestess of On. Taboo as it may seem to us, such a relationship would be no different than that between their ancestors Isaac and Rebecca or Jacob and Leah and Rachel. According to the same Midrash and the *Rabbeinu Bachya*, Joseph recognized his kin by an amulet given her by Jacob before she was cast away, which bore either the name of Israel or that of God.⁴⁰

We are struck with yet another curiosity when, after Joseph has revealed himself to his visiting brothers, he advises them to tell the Pharaoh that they, like their shared Semitic ancestors before them, are shepherds by trade, because “all shepherds are an abomination unto the Egyptians.” It is apparently by telling the Pharaoh this that they would be permitted to tend their

³⁹ Tuchman and Rapoport, *Moses' Women*, pg. 5.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 5-6.

flocks over in Goshen, a hilly land by the Delta that would be a good place for shepherds to tend their flocks (*Gen.* 46:31-34). This dialogue should raise a question or two. First of all, what do the Egyptians have against shepherds? And if they are such an abomination to them, why then should the Pharaoh bless them so wholeheartedly? Not only does he welcome the children of Israel to be shepherds in the best of Egypt; he even requests that any active men among them be made rulers over his own royal cattle (*Gen.* 47:6). The only plausible way to reconcile this seeming discrepancy would be for the Pharaoh of Egypt himself to not be an Egyptian. This seeming absurdity is of course completely possible if the king in question was actually of the Hyksos Dynasty—those invading Semitic Syro-Palestinians referred to as “shepherd kings” that ruled Egypt from Avaris in the land of Goshen. If lining up the time of Abraham with the reign of Senusret I is tricky but plausible, there is a very definite consensus among the various systems of biblical dating that the time of Joseph agrees with the time of the Hyksos Dynasty in Egypt, dated to between 1680-1540 BC.⁴¹

According to Josephus, the term Hyksos is not just interpreted as “shepherd kings,” but also more agreeably to ancient history as “captive shepherds,” in respect to Joseph, who told the king that he was a “captive,”⁴² but also perhaps to the whole of the Hebrew nation who wound up captives in Egypt. This theory also rectifies yet another biblical curiosity: why after the 400-year gap between *Genesis* and *Exodus* the Israelites’ good relationship with their Egyptian hosts should be so bitterly reversed. When we read in *Exodus* 1:8 that a new king arose over Egypt “who did not know Joseph,” it is understood that this is a whole new dynasty; one that would not have the same kindred relationship with the Hebrews as the Hyksos kings had. The Second

⁴¹ *Jewish Study Bible*, footnotes, pg. 92.

⁴² Josephus, *Against Apion*, 1:14:83, 92.

Intermediate Period has ended and the Egyptians have taken back their country from the Asiatic occupiers; begin the golden age of Ancient Egyptian history and the time of the biblical Exodus.

When the baby Moses, whom some identify with the controversial monotheistic Pharaoh Akhenaten (c. 1367-1361 BC),⁴³ is spared in a reed basket floating down the Nile, it resembles not just an Ancient Near Eastern birth myth such as that attributed to the Akkadian king Sargon,⁴⁴ but also an Egyptian fertility rite in which the Pharaoh's daughter, acting as Isis or Hathor, comes out to bathe in the Nile and spare a child brought to her by the river god which otherwise drowns all the others, like so many victims of the Great Flood.⁴⁵ In this sense, Moses is identified with the Egyptian god Osiris, whose body was interred in a tamarisk tree. It would seem that Moses' mother and sister, the two nursemaids of *Exodus* 2:2-10, were aware of this ritual and waited for the right time to set themselves in the right positions to make the Egyptian fertility rite work in their favor. Moses' adoptive mother, the Egyptian Princess Batya, is considered an honorary Hebrew in her role as a sympathetic matriarch, who even goes against the will of her powerful Egyptian father to fulfill the prophecy of the Israelite God.⁴⁶

According to Midrash recorded in Luis Ginzburg's *Legends of the Jews, Vol. 2*, it is during Moses' flight from the Pharaoh that he finds himself recruited in a military-political role reminiscent of that which Abram takes on in *Genesis* 14. A war has broken out between the Ethiopians—otherwise known then as the Cushites or Nubians; mortal enemies of the Egyptians,

⁴³ Gardner, pg. 257.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, pg. 186.

⁴⁵ Beall, Judith. Class discussion, History 370, Fall 2015.

⁴⁶ Tuchman and Rapoport, *Moses' Women*, pg. 80-86.

who like the Hyksos, would take over the land at one point (25th Dynasty)⁴⁷—and some Canaanite nations to the East that had hitherto been subject to them.⁴⁸ For his assistance to the Ethiopian king Kikanos, Moses is made commander-in-chief, and subsequently even the King of Ethiopia himself, whereby he is given Kikanos's widow Queen Adoniah to wife. Recalling his covenantal admonition not to marry descendants of Ham, Japheth, or Canaan, Moses does not ultimately consummate the marriage. After forty years serving as their governor, he leaves the Ethiopian throne to the widow's son Monarchos and heads to Midian, land of Abraham's descendants through Keturah, where he meets the woman with whom he does consummate a marriage—the daughter of the idolatrous priest of On named Jethro.

Similar to Asenath or Batya, Zipporah is another foreign but kindred woman who plays a key role in the Israelite plight. Warding off other shepherds, he meets her at a well from which he helps her draw water (*Ex.* 2:16-17), just as Jacob had once done for the shepherdess Rachel (*Gen.* 29:2-10). At the time Moses is on the run from the Pharaoh, who is determined to kill him for killing the taskmaster who was oppressing a Hebrew slave in Goshen⁴⁹ (*Ex.* 2:15). This fact would help to explain the otherwise odd episode of 4:24-26, where “the Lord” tries to kill him and Zipporah spares his life by hastily circumcising him and their child. It tells us that perhaps not every “Lord” mentioned in the five books composed by the Egyptian-born Moses necessarily refers to the Hebrew God, as it was customary among the Egyptians that their king should be seen as a god. It also tells us that even generations after Abraham, circumcision was still recognized as a specifically Egyptian custom rather than a Hebrew one. In fact, it is apparently here a means by which to distinguish an Egyptian from a Hebrew; a fact which Zipporah took advantage of to conceal Moses' Hebrew descent from the bloodthirsty Pharaoh.

⁴⁷ Precourt, Bruce. Course Reader, Classics 274: Ancient Egyptian Civilization, Spring 2015.

⁴⁸ Ginzburg, *Legends of the Jews, Vol. 2.*, IV:80.

⁴⁹*ibid.*, IV:8:73.

It is finally at this point that we turn to the Near Eastern history handed down to us through the Hellenistic Age; arguably the closest, most complete thing we have to a primary source on the events in question besides the Bible, if a bit indirectly and with a particular cultural agenda in mind. In his work *Against Apion*, Jewish historian Flavius Josephus (c. 37 – 100 AD) employs excerpts from an otherwise lost work by the Graeco-Egyptian priest Manetho (c. 3rd Century BC.) called the *Aegyptica* (History of Egypt) in order to prove to the Hellenistic world the antiquity of his race. Manetho himself worked primarily from older Egyptian records and traditions, which he translated into Greek for the Ptolemaic Kingdom. The excerpts which Josephus shares concern the Hyksos invasion of and expulsion from Egypt, which he endeavors to relate to the biblical account of the Israelite Exodus out of Egypt.

The first excerpt begins during the reign of a king named Timaus, when “men of ignoble birth” (ie, not Egyptian) from the east were so bold as to make expedition into Egypt and somehow manage to easily subdue it with unprovoked force. Taking Egypt’s governors under their power, they went on to pillage and plunder the cities and temples, killing many and taking their women and children into slavery.⁵⁰ This is obviously the Hyksos and clearly does not resemble what we know of the Hebrews of the biblical Exodus. Joseph and his brothers may have sojourned into and earned power in Egypt pretty smoothly, but that may be because their Semitic allies the Hyksos had already taken Egypt by force by the time the Israelites arrived there.

⁵⁰ Josephus, *Against Apion* I:14:75-76, in Whiston, William, translator., *The New Complete Works of Josephus*. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications (1999).

According to the account, the Hyksos shepherd-kings and their descendents “kept possession of Egypt for 511 years,”⁵¹ though modern dating only gives their time of rule about 140 years. Such a disagreement is not at all surprising. Between Manetho’s records and accepted modern Egyptology, there are often discrepancies between king names, their successions, and the lengths of their reigns. It also should be kept in mind that the Hyksos had inhabited part of Egypt for some time before they actually rose to power.

One of said eastern invaders named Salatis went on to make himself pharaoh of a new dynasty, living in Memphis while collecting tribute from both upper and lower Egypt, and rebuilding the city of Avaris with a walled fortress in the Saite nome. He also set up garrisons in strategic locations, with the particular aim of going on to take Assyria next.⁵² The name of this first Hyksos ruler reflects the title *shalit* given to Joseph when he became the Pharaoh’s governor in *Genesis* 42:6,⁵³ whereby he revolutionized the system of tribute owed to the king (*Gen.* 47:26).

In Manetho’s kinglist for the 15th Dynasty, which does not come to us through the filter of Josephus but rather derives from even more ancient records called *Syncellus* kept by a certain Africanus, there is no mention of any Salatis,⁵⁴ though the first Hyksos king is given as Saites or Sethroite, for whom the local nome is named. It may be that Salatis and Saite/Sethroite are more or less but transliterated variations of each other, as they may also be with Set/Seth. In Manetho’s *History of Egypt* as it comes down to us through Josephus, Salatis rebuilt the city of Avaris with strong walls in said Saite (Sethroite) nome, a territory sacred to Set, or as the Greeks called him, Typhon. To the Egyptians, Set was the mortal enemy of the great Egyptian god

⁵¹ Josephus, I:14:84.

⁵² *Ibid.*, I:14:77.

⁵³ Gruen, *Heritage and Hellenism*. Berkely: University of California Press (1998), pg. 57.

⁵⁴ Cory, I.P. *The Ancient Fragments Containing What Remains of the Writings of Sanchoniatho, Berossus, Abydenus, Megasthenes, and Manetho*.

Osiris and his son Horus.⁵⁵ To the Semites, Set could be identified with Seth, Adam's son who pro-generated the redemptive purer race of mankind (*Gen. 5*) after Cain killed Abel (*Gen. 4*). In the Egyptian legend of "The Quarrel of Apophis and Sekenre [the Theban vassal king]," which depicts the former Hyksos' king demanding that the latter vassal king in Thebes subdue the rebellious clamor of the native Egyptians, the Hyksos King Apophis worships no other gods but Seth,⁵⁶ just as good Hebrews vow to worship no other god but that worshipped by their ancestors, descended from Seth.

The vassal kings in Thebes eventually manage a successful insurrection led by King Alisphragmuthosis, whereby the majority of the shepherds are ultimately subdued and driven out of all other parts of Egypt. Still a faction remains in Avaris, protected by the strong walls they built. A battle ensues between the Hyksos and Alisphragmuthosis' son and heir, the rebel vassal king Thummosis;⁵⁷ obviously the same known otherwise to history as Thutmose I.⁵⁸ After a frustrated attempt at a siege of Avaris, the warring forces come to an agreement whereby the Hyksos can go unharmed if they leave Egypt with all their families and effects. So it is that no less than 240,000 of them set out from Egypt through the wilderness toward Syria. Out of fear for the Assyrians however, they go on to build a city called Jerusalem instead, in the country now known as Judea.⁵⁹

This is what Josephus purports to be the Egyptian version of the events of the Exodus, in which there are certainly some striking similarities, though definitely a few differences to reconcile. One significant discrepancy lies in how in this account, the Egyptians wish to drive out the Hyksos rulers forcefully; whereas in the Bible they wish to forcefully prevent the Hebrew

⁵⁵ Precourt, *Classics* 390.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ *Ibid.* 1:14:86-88.

⁵⁸ Bard, Kathryn A. *An Introduction to the Archaeology of Ancient Egypt*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing (2008), pg. 210.

⁵⁹ Josephus, 1:14:88-90.

slaves from leaving. On this point we need to make a distinction between the Hyksos and Hebrews, who are not necessarily to be understood as one and the same, but at least as allies of kindred heritage. This notion we will see play out in the rest of Manetho's account, whether Josephus acknowledges it or not. The discrepancies we find may constitute a conflation of events from different perspectives, with various elements either confused, omitted, or amended; be it by Manetho, Josephus, the Bible, or a combination thereof.

One objection put forth by modern skeptics is that the negotiated truce bears no resemblance to what happens in the Bible story.⁶⁰ Perhaps it does in fact, but in a qualified sense. In the Bible, there is much magical competition between the Pharaoh and Moses before the former finally gives in and says, just like Thummosis does in the Manetho excerpt, that the people with all their families and effects can leave unharmed (*Ex.* 12:31). In this sense, there is just such a negotiated truce in the Bible story; though the Pharaoh ultimately changes his mind and tries, unsuccessfully, to pursue his fleeing captives (*Ex.* 14).

While Manetho records that no less than 240,000 Hyksos left Egypt, *Exodus* 12:37 tells us that 600,000 children of Israel followed Moses out of Egypt. Of course, such vast, round numbers can be chalked up to loose exaggeration, and this detail is essentially inconsequential. The notion that they were heading to Syria would make sense for the Hyksos, but not so much for the biblical Israelites if their whole dream was to get back to the Promised Land of Canaan. Were it not for that notion, perhaps we could relate this to *Exodus* 13:17, where God has His people pass not through the land of the Philistines—a coastal trade route connecting the Nile Delta with Canaan and Syria—lest they see war and decide to turn back to Egypt. The fact that the shepherds of Manetho's history ultimately head toward Canaan is just as much in keeping with Hyksos heritage as it is with Hebrew, since the latter also trace their roots back to the Fertile

⁶⁰ Gruen, pg. 56.

Crescent.⁶¹ Still revisionists threatened by any hints at a Hebrew-Hyksos connection write off this striking mention of a mass migration to Judea as either posthumously interpolated by Josephus or simply insignificant.⁶²

Later in *Against Apion*, Josephus shares more Egyptian records from Manetho, noting how in this case the priest was not working from written records, but from “what rumors and reports passed abroad about the Jews.”⁶³ The Jewish historian asserts that the Egyptian historian introduced into his records the incredible idea that the Egyptians, who were prone to leprosy and such, had intermingled with the Jews, whereby they were condemned to leave Egypt lest they contaminate their sacred race. The record goes that King Amenophis, desiring to see the gods for himself, endeavored to purify Egypt of such lepers and other impure peoples by isolating them to the east side of the Nile, where they would work the quarries.

Josephus asserts that it was Manetho’s intention to maliciously characterize the Jews as said lepers and impure people quarantined to the quarries. Skeptics point out that it is Josephus, and not Manetho, who makes the connection between his Jewish people and the lepers and other such afflicted people mentioned in the excerpt. The Egyptians, they say, would have no malicious reason to do such a thing in relating their history to the Greeks.⁶⁴ This objection assumes that Manetho was inventing the whole story at the time he put it down in Greek, rather than relating what he knew from ancient traditions, as Josephus himself tells us. What does it matter if the Ptolemaic recipients of Manetho’s historical records were on good terms with the Jews or not and would have no interest in Egyptian polemic against them? This supposes some kind of anachronistic political agenda affecting the contents of Manetho’s records, when all that

⁶¹ Berlin, Adele and Marc Zvi Brettler, *The Jewish Study Bible*. New York: Oxford University Press (2004), footnotes, pg. 92.

⁶² Gruen, pg. 56.

⁶³ Josephus, 1:26:229-37.

⁶⁴ Gruen, pg. 56; 63-64.

matters to their integrity is the fact that the Egyptians and Jews *of the time in question* were not on good terms with each other when the events therein described actually occurred.

If Manetho does not mention the Jews by name in his history, it is of little importance. In fact, it would reek of anachronism if he did. The Egyptian priest was conveying his people's history to the Greeks from ancient records and traditions culled from times long before the people we now call Jews would have been referred to as such; nor would they even be a sovereign nation known as Israel until some time after the events of the Exodus. When they first entered Egypt, Israel was but a new name given to Jacob, titular forefather of an extended family of but yet seventy people, including the original twelve tribal patriarchs. If they were known amongst Canaanites as Hebrews, it was because they were nomadic shepherds like the Hyksos of the same time and place were. There is little indication that "Hebrew" was a term used to describe an organized nation of any significance at the time.

Along similar lines fails the dubious argument that if Manetho's narrative was to be an Egyptian rejoinder against the Jewish version of events, this must pre-suppose that the Egyptians would have to have been exposed to said Jewish version of events, and even the *Septuagint* recorded roughly around the same time would have been too recently released to warrant such a swift counterpoint from the Egyptians.⁶⁵ This again presumes that Manetho was inventing new tales at the time and not regaling from ancient tradition, as we already know he was. Further, why would the Egyptians need to have been exposed to a recorded Jewish version of events in any form or at any time whatsoever in order to record their own version of events, counter-polemic or not, if the events in question are a part of their history too?

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, pg. 60.

The basic details of Manetho's narrative agree with a first-hand account we have from a citizen named Ahmose, fighting in the campaigns of Ahmose I and Tuthmose I.⁶⁶ Josephus accuses Manetho of inventing King Amenophis and thereby neglecting to number the length of his reign and ascribing fabulous stories to his reign, as if forgetting that he had already related the story of the shepherds' departure to Jerusalem some 518 years prior.⁶⁷ In actuality, it would seem that between the two excerpts we are really dealing with two separate but related incidents, conflated together in a manner that would account for the confusion in kingly reigns and the different theories concerning the dating of the biblical Exodus. What Josephus may be missing here is the notion that the enslavement of the Hebrews logically should begin *after* the expulsion of the Hyksos and not before or during it; hence the Hyksos expulsion and the Hebrew Exodus should not be considered one and the same, but related, subsequent events separated by hundreds of years. This notion is even supported by Josephus's own reading of Manetho, whether or not he sees it himself. On this point we may also note that there does not even need to be this huge gap in years between reigns, and Manetho's dating of kingly reigns is not nearly as accurate as Josephus purports it to be. On the other hand, Josephus owes his primary source a little more credibility than he grants it concerning the existence of a King Amenophis. Contrary to what he asserted in the 1st Century AD, modern Egyptology now recognizes a handful of kings named Amenhotep who happen to fall in the same dynastic line as Ahmose and Tuthmoses.⁶⁸ As a matter of fact, some scholarship places the Exodus during the reign of Amenhotep II (c. 1450-1425 BC) based on the statement in *1 Kings* 6:1 that Solomon began the construction of the Temple during the fourth year of his reign (961 BC), 480 years since the Exodus.⁶⁹

⁶⁶ Beall, Judith. Class Reader, History 201: The Ancient World, Fall 2014, pp. 21-22; Pitchard, James B., editor. "Expulsion of the Hyksos," *The Ancient Near East: An Anthology of Texts and Pictures*. Princeton, 1958, pp. 173-175.

⁶⁷ Josephus, 1:26:230.

⁶⁸ Bard, pp. 57, 209, 213, 236.

⁶⁹ Whiston, pg. 95.

Otherwise this Amenophis of Manetho's account has been identified as Amenhotep III (ca. 1391 – 1353 or 1388 – 1351 BC), whose controversial son Akhenaten would stir up a monotheistic revolution in the face of Egypt's traditional polytheism, leading some to associate him with Moses. The character of Osarsiph (Osiris) in Manetho's account has been identified with both Moses and/or Akhenaten. Of course the latter ruled from Armana, aka Akhetaten, and not Avaris, and had no connection to the Hyksos Dynasty, which by that time had already been deposed and driven out. It is possible that the Armana Period could have coincided with the time of the biblical Exodus, or at the very least reasonable to speculate that one event had some connection with the other.⁷⁰

The generally accepted dating of the Exodus places it a couple centuries later during the reign of Rameses II (c. 1279-1213), who transplanted the Egyptian capital from Thebes to the old Hyksos capital of Avaris, forcing the Hebrew slaves to build his cities of Pithom and Pi-Raamses over it. This could indicate a connection between the Hyksos and the Hebrews if the latter were being forced to rebuild the Egyptian capital over the ruins of the Hyksos' old stronghold; a very Egyptian way to embarrass a squashed insurrection. The dating of the Exodus to the reign of Rameses II is scripturally supported by *Exodus* 1:11 and archaeologically backed up by an excavated Egyptian document from the time known as the Leiden Papyrus. This latter speaks of an official in the court of Rameses II who ordered that grain rations should be distributed to "the soldiers and to the *Apiru* [Hebrews] who transport stones to the great pylon of

⁷⁰ Osman, Ahmed. "Egypt Remembers: Ancient Accounts of the Great Exodus." Ancient Origins (2014).

Ramasses.”⁷¹ Egyptian records place Pi-Rameses along the eastern Nile Delta, right by the land of Goshen where the Israelite shepherds dwelled.⁷² It has been positively identified by Austrian archaeologist Manfred Bietak to line up with the period of the Exodus. The same region was found to contain a plethora of Asiatic/ Canaanite remains in the area of the slave houses.⁷³

Yet two more excavated Egyptian documents support the Rameses theory of the Exodus dating, while also shedding some light on the events related in Manetho’s second excerpt.⁷⁴ First there is the so-called “Israel Stele” dating from 1210 BC during reign of Rameses’ son Merenptah, which describes the pharaoh’s victories over a handful of nations in Canaan. Most significantly, it gives us our earliest archaeological reference to the Israelites as a nation where we read that, “Israel is laid waste, his seed is not.” The fact that the nation is said to have been effectively wiped off the map does not necessarily negate the biblical version which states that the Israelites escaped to Canaan; rather it speaks to the extent to which the proud Egyptians were known to exaggerate their victories and whitewash their losses.⁷⁵ Then there is the Elephantine Stele dated from around the same time which records a renegade Egyptian faction bribing Asiatics already living there to assist them in a rebellion which ultimately fails. Such an incident supported by archaeology makes all too much sense out of the events of Manetho’s account via Josephus,⁷⁶ particularly concerning what happens next.

The narrative goes on that after the lepers and polluted peoples have worked for awhile in such miserable slavery, they successfully petition the king to set apart the city of Avaris, now desolate of the shepherd kings who had previously ruled from there, as a protective habitation for

⁷¹ Beall, Judith. Class discussion, History 370, Fall 2015, pg. 43; Lichtman, Rabbi Dovid. “Archaeology of the Bible,” *Society Today* (2001). www.aish.com/societyWork/sciencenature/Archaeology_and_the_Bible.

⁷² *Ibid.*, pg. 42.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ Whiston, pg. 95;

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, pg. 43.

them. In this we find some relative agreement with *Exodus* 1:11. It is worth noting how in *Exodus* 4:6, Moses' hand is made leprous and subsequently healed by God as a sign of His power. Later in *Numbers* 5:2 we read that Moses himself separated the lepers from amongst the Israelite camp in the Wilderness; a fate that even his own sister Miriam was made to suffer temporarily as punishment for reproaching him (12:10). From both Manetho's narrative and these biblical examples, we understand leprosy in such contexts to refer not necessarily to a physical ailment but to a state of spiritual impurity.

Having secured a stronghold in Avaris, the quarantined lepers begin to plot their rebellion. Among them there are learned priests, and a prophecy is going around that certain people will come to their aid and help them conquer Egypt.⁷⁷ Said prophecy reminds us of that concerning the coming of a savior who would lead the Hebrew slaves out of Egypt. Enter Osarsiph (a corruption of Osiris), appointed ruler from amongst the priests of Heliopolis (On) confined to Avaris. He sets up oaths and laws for them opposite to Egyptians customs, charging them to reject the worship of Egyptian gods, smash their idols, slaughter their sacred animals, and make ready for war against them.⁷⁸ All these details should strike a Bible-reader as very familiar. Some of them could even be construed in light of the ten plagues. According to the Manetho account via Josephus, this Heliopolitan-born priest was renamed Moses, signifying one preserved from out of the water (*cf. Ex.* 1:10), when he went over to the side of the lepers. Stating that Manetho does not miss the truth by much, Josephus takes him to task on the notion that his nation's great prophet Moses, whom the Egyptians acknowledge to be a person of

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 1:26:236.

⁷⁸ Josephus, 1:26:236-240.

wonderful divinity, was Heliopolitan by birth. They at least agree that the Hebrew people were not.⁷⁹

This Osarsiph has alternately been identified with the revolutionary monotheist Akhenaten, whom some also been identify with Moses. Of course Akhenaten ruled from Armana, aka Akhetaten, and not Avaris, and had no connection to the Hyksos Dynasty, which by that time had already been deposed and driven out. It is possible that the Armana Period could have coincided with the time of the biblical Exodus, or at the very least reasonable to speculate that one event had some connection with the other.⁸⁰ It can be no coincidence that Akhenaten's revolution falls right in between the defeat of the Hyksos by the 18th Dynasty and the rise of Rameses in the 19th. The fact that the two Manetho excerpts skip right over the Armana Period should be no surprise. After all, it is the customary way for the Egyptian priesthood to write out heretical leaders from their archives. Apparently this conspicuous gap in Manetho's history was enough to confuse Josephus.

Now it remains for us to take to task those revisionists who would insist that Josephus's second introduction of Osarsiph whereby he is identified as Moses seems anomalously contrived, as if it were an interpolation on the part of Joseph into the records of Manetho, of which we have no other original. Said revisionists have nothing of substance with which to back up this claim, and the content of the passage should speak for itself. Whether Josephus or his doubters would like to admit it or not, there is no reason that a priest of Heliopolis must be Egyptian and not Hebrew-born. In fact, we even find a precedent for the contrary in the immediate family of Joseph, aka Zaphnath-paaneah, earlier in *Genesis* 41:45. Moses himself similarly marries into

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 1:30:278; 31:279-87.

⁸⁰ Osman, Ahmed. "Egypt Remembers: Ancient Accounts of the Great Exodus." *Ancient Origins* (2014).

the same priesthood through his Midianite wife Zipporah, daughter of the priest Jethro, just before he is first addressed by God while tending his father-in-law's sheep on Mount Horeb (*Ex.* 2:16-21; 3:1-2).

The Hebrews' separate but kindred heritage with the Hyksos is proven by what happens next in Josephus's account of Manetho's narrative.⁸¹ The rebel leader Moses sends ambassadors to those shepherds who had been previously driven out to Jerusalem by the Egyptians, inviting them to assist his people in a revolt against their common enemies, with the promise that in so doing, they would be returned to their former stronghold in Avaris which they had re-built for them. The Hyksos receive this invitation with hearty enthusiasm and return to Egypt *post haste*.⁸² This tells us quite clearly that the Israelites and the Hyksos are not one and the same people, but sympathetic allies.

Meanwhile Amenhophis and the other Egyptians leaders grow nervous, hiding their idols and sacred animals. The king himself stays back, but he sends his son Rameses off to war with the enemy, taking as allies the Ethiopians.⁸³ A bloody battle ensues in which the shepherds decimate the Egyptian idols and drive out their priests.⁸⁴ It is unclear by the end of the narrative who exactly "won" the war. That much we leave up to known history and respective Egyptian and Hebrew perspectives to decide. Not surprisingly, excavated Egyptian documents relating to such incidents make them the victors. At the same time, this should be the point where in the Bible we read of the Hebrews' successful Exodus out of Egypt by which they went on to re-claim Canaan.

⁸¹ *Ibid.* 1:29:241-9.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 1:29:241-3.

⁸³ *Ibid.* 1:29:243-247.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.* 1:26:248-9.

Whatever the case, the fact that we have all these seemingly conflicting accounts from naturally conflicting perspectives that thinly conflate the plight of the Hebrews with those of the Hyksos should be taken not necessarily as a notion to negate the veracity of all sides of the coin, but rather can be taken to paint a more nuanced and complete picture of what may have actually happened along the Mediterranean some time between the 17th and 13th Centuries BC. It is reasonable to assume that Manetho, who derived his information from the preserved archives of the Egyptian priesthood and their oral traditions, gives us a faithful account of the Egyptian version of events. Unfortunately Josephus's flawed, but ultimately not too far off, interpretation of it has condemned it to the skepticism of modern scholarship, and for no fault of his own, Manetho's credibility has been dismissed. Josephus is correct that Manetho's excerpts provide the Egyptian account of the Exodus and prove the antiquity of his Jewish race, though he misidentifies them as the invading Hyksos while simultaneously correctly identifying them as the leprous shepherds. While the Hyksos shepherd kings and the Hebrew shepherds may not necessarily have been one and the same people, they were of anciently kindred Semitic heritage with intimately intertwined histories; a notion which serves at least to prove the antiquity of the Jewish race as a people distinct from any alleged Egyptian or Canaanite origin, just as Josephus set out to prove.

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